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ABSTRACT

"La frontera" is the unique, highly interdependent region spanning the boundary between the United States and Mexico. As this region develops into a zone of cooperation, it must address such issues as poverty and unemployment on both sides of the border, differing educational requirements and structures, continuing migration of Mexican students to U.S. schools, need for reciprocity in teacher certification, issues of bilingualism and bilingual education, and political factors. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory initiated the Border Colloquy Project to develop common understandings about educational issues and needs facing "la frontera," foster an internationally shared vision for education, and encourage development of comprehensive binational plans to fulfill that vision. The project focuses particularly on the shared border regions of Texas, New Mexico, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, and Chihuahua. In 1994, the project sponsored seven meetings of teachers, administrators, community members, and university faculty. Participants developed a vision of "la frontera" in 2010, and identified priorities for achieving this vision: changing stereotypes and biased attitudes, teaching residents in both countries about each other's history and culture, addressing needs for funding and other resources, and extending binational educational cooperation. Initiatives that are already under way to support the common vision of "la frontera" are described, and project plans through 1997 are outlined. (SV)

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CHAPTER 11

Exploring Binational Educational Issues:
A Report from the Border Colloquy Project

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This article describes the binational concerns that have led the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), one of 10 regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, to establish the Border Colloquy Project. This project focuses on the quality and accessibility of education in the shared border regions of the states of Texas, New Mexico, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and Chihuahua. The chapter further describes the Border Colloquy Project's major activities and findings to date, and outlines plans for ongoing cooperative activities among educators in the region known as la frontera.

Background: Issues Facing *La Frontera*

La frontera—the region spanning the boundary between the United States and Mexico—is centered on the most populated international border in the world. More than 16.5 million people live along it. Increasingly, the interactions among these people are leading to overlapping and highly interdependent regional economies, societies, and cultures.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has redefined the economic significance of a 2,000-mile political line on the map, while migration and cultural influences are helping to smear that line into a regional blur. Tens of thousands of people cross the border each day; many move back and forth between homes in Mexico and jobs, even schools, in the United States. Among those moving North are many who eventually work or settle permanently in communities as far afield as the states of Washington, Illinois, Michigan, and New York.

With immigration a central fact of life along *la frontera*, consideration of border issues carries a huge weight of emotional and political baggage, not only for the region's residents but for U.S. and Mexican citizens throughout the two countries. Many Americans consider *the border* to be a fence, a barrier designed to maintain stability in the country's population, economy, and services (although the gates through this fence tend to open or close depending on U.S. demand for cheap labor). For its part, Mexico considers emigration a drain on the country's resources; the government has enacted measures designed to protect its language and cultures from its larger, sometimes overbearing northern neighbor (Alexander-Kasparik, 1993).

Many border experts believe, however, that NAFTA will serve as a catalyst for the creation of a region that spans current boundaries, a region neither *here* nor *there*, in which neighboring nations remove rather than construct barriers, in which people move freely and the infrastructures that support them—economic, governmental, cultural, and educational systems and services—are compatible and cooperative. The border, then, is conceived not as a line with *us* on one side and *them* on the other but as the central feature in a zone of cooperation, and *la frontera* becomes not a sharp edge between peoples but a community with its own energy, direction, and future.

Although this image of community may seem like idealism or fantasy, the present reality is that territories along the border, such as the "twin cities" of El Paso-Juárez or Laredo-Nuevo Laredo, are already as closely bound as Siamese twins joined at the hip. This interdependency is destined to increase as NAFTA's provisions are phased in over the next 16 years.

With migration and interdependence as givens, the questions that arise are not *shoulds* or *ifs* but *hows*. Some of the biggest *hows* relate to education, which must address a number of complex issues, such as the following:

Poverty and unemployment. These are serious problems on both sides of the border. Thousands of people live in *colonias*, without basic services such as running water. Many families perform migrant labor, moving with the seasons and earning subsistence wages. Health care and

other needed social services are largely unavailable. School-based clinics and provision of social services through the schools are slowly gaining favor in the United States, but they are "still talked about more than they are offered" (Alexander-Kasparik, 1994, p. 17). Mexico, on the other hand, provides for health care through its Social Security system; problems there focus less on equity of coverage than on the general inadequacy of resources to address the tremendous need. How can schools on both sides of the border offer poor and transient students the highest quality education? How can schools interact with social service providers to assure all students access to the basic necessities that they must have—food, shelter, health, and safety—in order to focus on learning? How can poor communities provide adequate resources for education?

Differing educational requirements, systems, and structures. Mexico and the United States have different educational requirements, systems, and structures. Contrary to popular perceptions in the United States, Mexico's requirements are sometimes more stringent than those in the United States. To graduate from *secundaria,* for example (*secundaria* encompasses the seventh through the ninth grades), a student must pass Algebra II, which is not required for a high school diploma in Texas (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1994). Students who try to move from one system to the other face major obstacles; Mexican students entering U.S. schools, for example, are sometimes forced to re-take subjects they have already covered in Mexico. How can educational requirements, curricula, and other aspects of schooling be made compatible so that students who move from one system to another are not penalized?

Continuing migration of Mexican students to U.S. schools. U.S. schools will continue to receive students from Mexico; one fifth of all undocumented immigrants are estimated to be children under the age of 15. The challenge, then, is to serve these students—and the rest of the school population—effectively. The schools that have proved most effective in meeting the needs of Mexican immigrant students are schools that are effective in general. They typically "have high expectations for student achievement, cultivate parent involvement in the child's schooling, and display strong and progressive . . . instructional and organizational leadership" (Alexander-Kasparik, 1993, p. 8). In addition to general characteristics of effectiveness, these schools also take specific actions to support immigrant students.

> Such schools also typically value the student's home language and culture; recognize and give immigrant population concerns priority; conduct outreach in parents' home language; train staff to understand and help meet immigrant needs; mainstream immigrant students in

classes with English-speaking students; and make placement decisions with appropriate assessments and expert consultation (Alexander-Kasparik, 1993, p. 8).

How can we assure that such effective school practices become the norm, rather than the exception?

Teacher training. Training and licensing requirements have been strengthened in both countries in recent years. However, there are still significant differences, and little or no reciprocity or recognition of credentials from one country to the other. Exchange programs are limited and short-term, and those that do exist "currently lean toward the United States for credentialing with no promise of reciprocity" (Alexander-Kasparik, 1993, p. 7). At the same time, too few U.S. teachers are sufficiently trained in bilingual education or English as a second language. How can teacher education and in-service training be made compatible and of consistently high quality, and educators' credentials be honored in both countries?

Language. Many believe that the full potential of this region cannot be realized until all its citizens are bilingual. Bilingual education is still debated in the United States, yet even certified bilingual teachers may not have mastered the levels of Spanish they need to be able to teach in Mexico, or to work most effectively with Mexican students in U.S. schools. Spanish-speaking students in the United States are often precluded from learning other subject matter before they learn English. Developmental bilingual education, often referred to as "two-way bilingual programs" or "dual-language programs," are designed to promote bilingualism among both majority- and minority-language students. In this enrichment bilingual education approach, children learn a second language through subject matter instruction in that language. Most importantly, the students are able to learn a second language and to continue to develop their first language skills. How can schools effectively provide developmental bilingual education for all students in the region, so that they can become fluent in both Spanish and English without any slowdown in content-area learning? And how can teachers receive the language training they may need?

Government sovereignty. Variations in federal, state, and local government structures and policies present barriers to cooperation on both sides of the border. How can governments retain the autonomy they need, yet provide policies, structures, and resources to support multinational initiatives?

Participants in SEDL's Border Colloquy Project are considering these issues and more as they plot a path from current problems to an imagined future. Although participants agree that the challenges to *la frontera* are

immense, they also feel strongly that the region is a resource, not a liability, and that with cooperation and good will, these challenges can be met.

The Border Colloquy Project

SEDL's Border Colloquy Project focuses on *la frontera*—the region along the boundary between the United States and The Republic of Mexico—with specific attention to the shared border regions of the states of Texas, New Mexico, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and Chihuahua. The Border Colloquy Project is designed to

- develop common understandings about the educational issues and needs facing *la frontera* as it experiences massive cultural and economic change;
- foster an internationally shared vision for the education and well-being of the region's children and youth; and
- encourage the development and use of comprehensive, binational plans to fulfill that vision.

The Border Colloquy Project was initiated in March 1994, after SEDL's Board of Directors targeted the educational needs of *la frontera* as an area of special concern. SEDL has a long history of involvement in border and bilingual, multicultural educational concerns; this work was a logical extension of institutional efforts.

Phase 1 of the project, which extended through November 1994, consisted primarily of a series of seven planning and information-sharing meetings that culminated in the development of an unprecedented binational vision statement for education in *la frontera*. Phase 2 began December 1, 1994, and will extend, at a minimum, through November 30, 1997. This phase of the project focuses on the development and implementation of action plans and on fostering the cooperative relationships that will be essential to effective implementation. SEDL is providing assistance and is facilitating interaction among educational communities on both sides of the border through brokering and networking activities.

Border Colloquy Meetings

The meetings conducted during Phase 1 of the project were designed to culminate in the creation of a vision statement that reflects a shared, binational perspective on the educational future of *la frontera* and its inhabitants. Meeting participants also began to consider elements of the action plans that are being fleshed out and implemented during Phase 2. To complete these tasks, SEDL first sponsored a series of five regional meet-

ings, followed by a meeting in Monterrey, Mexico, with representatives of the departments of education in each of the Mexican states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas. Finally, SEDL sponsored a culminating meeting in Austin, Texas, whose participants were drawn from each of the six preceding meetings.

Regional meetings. The five regional meetings brought together educators and community representatives from specific areas within *la frontera*; they were held as follows:

- McAllen, Texas, April 18-19, 1994, cohosted by the Region I[1] Education Service Center, with 14 participants plus SEDL staff and consultants;
- El Paso, Texas, May 9-10, 1994, cohosted by the Region XIX Education Service Center, with 27 participants;
- Las Cruces, New Mexico, May 10-11, 1994, cohosted by the Las Cruces School District #2, with 27 participants;
- Ciudad Juárez, June 9-10, 1994, cohosted by the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, Cd. Juárez, with 80 participants; and
- Reynosa, June 15-16, 1994, cohosted by El Centro de Actualización de Magisterio de Nuevo Laredo, with 33 participants.

Participants included students, teachers, principals, bilingual supervisors, and superintendents; staff from state and regional education agencies; legislators and legislative staff members; business, church, and community leaders; university faculty; health and human services providers; and immigration officials.

Participants in the regional meetings were asked to imagine what education should be like by the year 2010, when NAFTA's provisions are to be fully implemented. They first described their image of the ideal community of *la frontera* in general, then focused specifically on schooling, developing a vision statement to picture what education should accomplish within that community. Finally, participants outlined the work that must be undertaken—changes in attitudes, values, systems, and services—in order to achieve their vision.

[1]The state of Texas is organized into 20 Education Service Center (ESC) regions. Although working closely with the Texas Education Agency, the centers are independent entities with the responsibility of serving public schools within their defined geographic areas. All ESCs are expected to provide services that support student achievement in the districts within their boundaries, although the ESCs differ in terms of the number and characteristics of member districts.

The ESCs work closely with districts to provide technical assistance in areas of accreditation and curriculum, professional development, and the implementation of PEIMS (Program Evaluation and Improvement Management System), a state-level data system. The ESCs also provide districts with instructional media, data processing services, and assistance in program improvement in areas such as bilingual education, special education, gifted and talented education, and programs for at-risk (of dropping out) students. Some ESCs also provide services in connection with Title I, migrant education, adult education, and similar programs.

The Monterrey meeting. The Monterrey meeting differed somewhat from the previous five regional meetings. Held on July 21-22, and cohosted by the Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM), it included representatives from the Secretaries of Education in each of the four Mexican border states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas, along with UDEM faculty and SEDL staff and consultants. The purposes of this meeting were to review learnings from each of the five regional meetings, to identify related activities that are already planned or underway in each of the four states, and to set priorities for cooperative action.

To prepare for the meeting, a group of UDEM faculty members reviewed the summary reports from the five regional colloquies; they presented their analysis of the colloquies as a basis for discussion. After their presentation, participants divided into small groups by state to address two questions: What activities or processes already exist in your state that address the concerns raised in the regional colloquies? And what areas of concern do you believe are most important? Finally, participants divided into mixed-state groups to consider the identified priorities and to add other areas of concern that might have been overlooked.

The Austin meeting. The Austin meeting, held August 1-2 at SEDL headquarters in Austin, Texas, brought together 38 representatives from the previous six meetings. Participants reviewed the vision statements that had been created at the regional meetings and worked to incorporate their ideas into a single, binational vision statement that could serve as a guide to cooperative action within *la frontera*. Participants also began working to develop action plans outlining concrete steps to be taken in order to help actualize their vision.

Findings from the Border Colloquy Meetings

In response to the charge to imagine what conditions in *la frontera* might be like by the year 2010, participants at the five regional meetings projected massive changes, and for the most part equated such change with opportunity, imagining that a changing economic climate will help to produce the resources needed to transform the region. They cautioned, however, that it will be essential to maintain a focus on equality and the well-being of people and the environment. UDEM faculty members summarized their concern this way: "We want to be competitive and productive, but at the

same time we look for social equity, respect for human beings, and opportunities for people to be successful."

The border region in the year 2010. In considering what *la frontera* might be like by the year 2010, participants in the regional meetings echoed common themes: economic development that brings with it massive changes in people, cultures, language, resources, and community infrastructures; and the need to assure a continuing focus on human and moral values, with an emphasis on respect for cultural traditions and beliefs. Specific comments included, for example, the following:

We will see the attitude that the river is to be used, not just to be crossed.

The region will be virtually self-sufficient and consequently able to satisfy the diverse demands of different sectors of its economy.

If present tendencies continue, we will have a conflictive and asymmetrical border. However, if tendencies change—and here education plays an important role—the border of the year 2010 could be an integrated, dynamic region with a high standard of living.

We believe that we will have a cultural mixture which will affect our language, art, customs, and other facets of both cultures. This "hybrid" culture will be neither a cultural integration nor the submission of one culture under another.

There ought to be a way we can cross gently into each other's lives.

The primary difference among these regional voices was that participants in the two Mexico meetings—in Ciudad Juárez and Reynosa—expressed a more cautious optimism about the anticipated changes. They spoke more in terms of what "should" happen rather than what is likely to happen, and emphasized that current problems will not disappear quickly:

There should be a sharing of knowledge, technology, and culture between the United States and Mexico without losing cultural identity.

We should get rid of the belief that our intellectual potential depends on whether we come from one or the other side of the border. We must free ourselves from old prejudices and mistaken ideas.

We should stop thinking about the communities on both sides of the border as being independent from each other. 'La frontera' *is a single community.*

Participants at all the meetings described *la frontera* in the next century

as an economically and culturally diverse, dynamic, and cosmopolitan region. They expect the divisions between the United States and Mexico to blur somewhat; participants in the U.S. meetings described a greater blurring of national boundaries than did participants from Mexico. All generally described the relatively free movement across the border not only of goods but of people, ideas, resources, and services. Some anticipate the creation of a regional government or oversight agency that spans national boundaries. Participants see tremendous population growth, leading to the need for improved infrastructures and human services—improved, high-tech transportation and communication; basic facilities such as water, electricity, and sewage; and services such as health and education. All groups perceive technology as increasingly important both to the economy and to education. Participants also were united in a focus on the environment; while some see increased opportunities for "clean" industry, others expressed concern that current environmental problems will increase.

Participants described an open, multicultural society in which bilingualism is an essential skill. However, every group expressed, in some form, the conviction—and the concern—that, no matter how global the economy or cosmopolitan the population, the inhabitants of *la frontera* will not lose their individual cultural heritage and values; the region will be characterized by "integration without erasing cultural differences, but rather supporting them." There will be a continuing concern for equality and individual well-being.

Education in *la frontera*. Participants in the regional meetings were generally in agreement about the kind of education that will be needed in *la frontera*. They described an educational system that is an integral part of community life. Two different groups used the phrase "full-service schools" to describe the concept of schools working with other community agencies to provide a full spectrum of services for students and their families—child care, parent education, health services, adult training, and the like. Specific comments included the following:

The quality of the school systems on both sides of the border would be equal.

Open the school from its isolated condition and engage it with the life of the community on both sides of the border.

We conceive education as an effective means for equalization, mobilization, and transformation.

We totally will reject failure in our schools.

We need an international set of standards. That would mean raising

our standards, especially at the elementary level, to those of the Mexican system. Standards and mastery become the key, not grade levels.

Our schools [will be] the central focus of the community, providing child-centered, comprehensive educational, health, and human services.

Education will need to prepare students for both work and citizenship; schooling will include a strong vocational focus, but also will impart values, teaching about students' own cultural traditions and encouraging respect for others. All students will need to become bilingual; technology will be integrated into instruction at all levels. Progress through school will be based on concept mastery rather than on grade levels; students will be able to move freely from school to school as their needs dictate.

To support this kind of education in *la frontera*, rules, policies, and resources will need to change. All participants anticipate greater cooperation and exchange between the educational systems in the United States and Mexico; some expect the creation of a binational, regional governing board. Educational standards will need to be uniformly high. Accreditation, teacher certification, and student entry and exit requirements will need to be coordinated. At the same time, almost every group noted the need to maintain local flexibility, so that local school districts can tailor their offerings to meet specific community needs.

Faculty from the Universidad de Monterrey, after analyzing the reports of each of the five regional meetings, identified elements of curricular change that would support economic growth and bicultural understandings while helping to maintain each country's identity and cultural and moral values. In their presentation at the Monterrey meeting, they identified six major elements:

- "human development," which includes a focus on respect for oneself, family, and society as well as on an integrated, humanist education;
- "the development of teaching-learning models for a bicultural environment," which involves "a personalized education that would use different educational models according to each student's learning pace";
- instruction in both Spanish and English, so that all students on both sides of the border will become fluent in both languages; the presenters noted, "Two neighbors that want to work together have to understand each other";
- the development of multimedia instructional materials, using technology to promote cultural exchanges and interactions;
- teacher training, in language particularly but also in other curricular areas; better training, the presenters noted, should help teachers become better valued and respected in their communities; and

- administrator training, with a focus on new approaches to managing the educational system; new concepts that focus on "bottom-up" decision-making hold promise for building new understandings.

Concerns and Priorities

Participants in the regional meetings described the kinds of changes they feel must occur in order to assure a productive future for *la frontera* and all of its inhabitants. They characterized their concerns in terms of changes in perceptions and attitudes, knowledge, resources, and binational cooperation.

Changing perceptions and attitudes. Participants in all five regional meetings focused intensively on misperceptions about the border region and on racial and ethnic stereotypes, describing these as major barriers to be overcome. Participants described public perceptions in the United States regarding Mexico and the border region as highly negative and seriously inaccurate; Mexico and its people are too often considered only as a drain on the United States, which overlooks the richness of its languages and culture, the resources it has to offer, and the quality of many of its educational policies.

Participants focused strongly on perceptions about language and language differences. One misperception among many Americans, they noted, is "about the superiority of English to Spanish." "We must accept differences in languages," one U.S. group stated; similarly, a participant in one of the Mexico meetings said, "It is time for some organizations and people from the United States to stop being intolerant and accept the use of our language in their communities."

Participants also pointed out that the United States and Mexico are economically interdependent, but there is a general perception, as a participant in a U.S. meeting stated, "that Mexico needs us and we don't need them." Related to this is the misperception of the border area as "economically deprived" rather than "economically viable."

Finally, participants in three of the five groups noted that people must alter their attitudes about change itself: "We have to get beyond seeing change as a problem all the time; we need to move people to where they embrace change."

Filling gaps in knowledge. Participants feel that residents in both Mexico and the United States need to learn more about each other's history, cultures, and educational and social systems:

We must get to know the border and become familiar with the cultural patterns of both countries.

We need knowledge regarding the ways in which both sides of the border maintain social, cultural, and economic relationships.

They generally feel that such learning can best occur through working together. Some groups also called for comparative studies focused on public schools and curriculum; one group spoke of the need for greater knowledge about "how to work with diversity."

Filling resource gaps. Participants see a substantial need for increased resources. The greatest problem, one group noted, lies with "seemingly insurmountable gaps related to federal funding" and the differences in the two countries' relative economic power. Alleviation of poverty is a major priority for most; so is funding to make good education accessible to all. One group detailed the need for increased teacher salaries, opportunities for teachers' professional advancement, funds for teacher preparation, and provisions for better educational facilities, technology, and materials.

Extending binational cooperation. Participants feel that strong leadership is needed at federal, regional, and state levels to accomplish change in *la frontera*. The governments of both Mexico and the United States need to develop cooperative arrangements that provide for common resources and regulations, while at the same time allowing for greater local autonomy and flexibility for the border region. Most critically, governments need to facilitate the sharing and equalization of financial resources; one group suggested moving toward common financial and currency systems, following the model of the European community.

One group focused in some detail on the need for cooperative efforts to address the environmental problems that have been raised by the development of heavy industry along the border. The border region needs to be able to attract "clean" industry; participants noted, "We need a notion of economic development which could include the promotion of *frontera* art, culture, music, and agriculture—not just heavy industry."

Discussions of binational cooperation focused primarily on education. Cooperation in education should focus on development of systems for international accreditation; exchanges of teachers, students, and materials; a focus on bilingual, multicultural education, including teacher training in these areas; and shared research. Some participants suggested the creation of "a similar educational infrastructure on both sides of the border through a common fund" and/or a regional board of education.

A Common Vision for Education

A major goal of the Border Colloquy Project's Phase 1 activities was the creation of a common vision regarding the future of education in the border region, a vision that can guide planners, policymakers, and practitioners

from both countries as they consider the purposes and practice of schooling in *la frontera*. To accomplish this task, SEDL first asked participants in the five regional colloquies to draft vision statements based on their discussions about the future of the border region. These five statements then provided a base from which participants in the regionwide Austin meeting—who included representatives from each of the regional colloquies and the Monterrey meeting—worked to develop a final, binational vision statement reflecting the group's shared goals.

Though they were phrased differently, and though some were composed in Spanish and some in English, the vision statements developed in the five regional meetings all reflect remarkably similar goals and concerns. All focus on the "holistic well-being" of students, on assuring that all children have the opportunity to grow up as productive, fulfilled members of society. That society, according to all five vision statements, will be "bicultural" or "multicultural," changing and dynamic. Most of the vision statements picture a close relationship between school and community; according to one statement, "the educational process will integrate school and community"; another states that "schools are the central focus of the community."

The vision statements also focus on character, dignity, and moral and democratic values. The goal of education, it is clear, is to prepare students not only vocationally and intellectually but morally and culturally as well. Education will offer "academic excellence, moral values, bicultural understanding and respect, and preparation for participation in work and society," enabling students to be "dynamic members of a multicultural society." Two of the vision statements address the concept of lifelong learning; one refers to "comprehensive educational, health, and human services."

Participants in the Austin meeting carried each of these concepts into the development of a unified vision statement. This vision statement—drafted, revised, and approved by educational and community leaders representing six of the border states in the United States and Mexico—is, to SEDL's knowledge, the first of its kind, a symbol of the movement toward cooperation and mutuality among the inhabitants of *la frontera*.

Binational Vision Statement Developed by Participants in the SEDL Border Colloquy Austin, Texas, August 1-2, 1994

We in the Mexico-United States border region, looking toward education in the year 2010, consider our children to be our most precious resource. Therefore, every individual has the right to equal educational opportunities through which she/he will develop self-

esteem, dignity, cultural pride, understanding of others, and the capacity to become a positive, contributing member of society.

To respond to the needs of this international, multilingual, multicultural community, we will have a binational educational system that is open, flexible, integrated, of high quality, and adapted to the region's common needs in an atmosphere of community. Recognizing the family as critical in the child's development, this system will offer health and human services and family education. It will include staff development and programs teaching environmental improvement, international understanding, cultural and moral traditions and values, and the skills to compete in a global economic society. It will use technology resources and multicultural, multilingual strategies.

Making the Vision Real: Initiating Cooperative Work

The SEDL Border Colloquy Project is designed to move from ideals to action. After the establishment of a common vision for *la frontera*, the next tasks are to consider initiatives that may be already underway and to develop plans and networks of support for those plans.

Existing initiatives. Participants in both the Monterrey and Austin meetings outlined some of the efforts already underway that support elements of the binational vision for education in *la frontera*. Their reports are summarized below.

The Monterrey meeting. In Monterrey, representatives of the Secretaries of Education from the four border states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas reported on current activities in their states. Participants from Chihuahua noted that interactive, multimedia approaches to education are essential tools for helping children to learn and to develop pride and respect, and a focus on this area is a strong priority for the state. The need for instructional materials "is fundamental in teaching"; for that reason, the state is developing a plan by which every teacher in the state can learn to work with computers to access the teaching materials they need. There is also a concern to expand student instruction using computerized programs; courses in mathematics, Spanish, and Mexican history already have been developed.

Representatives from Coahuila focused on two general areas of concern: education for the development of individual and social capabilities, and the application of science and technology to improve production. Specific initiatives that address these broad areas include a focus on educational quality. To support quality in education, the Foundation for Educational Excellence is designed to "reward the effective classroom performance of

teachers on every educational level." Another effort is the consolidation of a research group at the Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila, whose research includes binational projects. One study examined the acquisition of Spanish and mathematics skills by children in the border area (Núñez López, 1994). Participants spoke in detail about the importance of educational research, noting that "educational attention has to be based on research, which is the starting point for decision making."

Representatives from Nuevo León identified bilingualism as "the number one problem," noting that the state has implemented a program for fourth, fifth, and sixth graders that reaches almost 8,000 children. A second concern is with the quality of the educational system; here, the state receives support from specialists in New Mexico and Texas, who participate in teacher training conferences. A third priority is teacher training in Spanish, mathematics, and science; in this area, the state has initiated Saturday programs focused on these subjects. Quality language instruction is also a concern; initiatives are being tried in which students work on their English skills using a computer center and special software. Technology is a final concern; some schools already are equipped with parabolic antennas, allowing for distance education and teacher access to new resources.

Representatives from Tamaulipas noted that the government in that state is supporting a number of initiatives, including a movement "towards the rescue of cultural values." One program that is being upgraded is "school for parents," which provides education regarding child care, health and hygiene, and drug and crime prevention. In terms of teaching-learning models, there is some exploration of "dynamic school" and "specialized teaching" principles. Language instruction is a somewhat weak area, because English is considered a "foreign language" rather than an essential second language; however, one promising pilot program is in place. There are also teacher and administrator training initiatives, including a border pilot program allowing for teacher exchanges. Participants noted that the various administrator training initiatives need to be better integrated.

The Austin meeting. In Austin, Dr. Roberto Zamora, Executive Assistant to the Texas Commissioner of Education, noted that the Texas Education Agency and the Mexican Secretaríat of Education have worked cooperatively for many years. He described a range of activities that have occurred over the past three years, including international conferences and seminars focused on the U.S. and Mexican educational systems, bilingual education, English as a second language, and instructional strategies and approaches; exchange agreements that include training programs for educators; and research activities.

Dr. Alberto Zamora, Associate Superintendent of the Learning Services Division of the New Mexico State Department of Education, noted that the

New Mexico legislature has allocated funds specifically for improving communication between Mexico and the United States. New Mexico has also helped to sponsor and participate in international conferences and has developed agreements with the states of Nuevo León and Guanajuato focused on educational exchange and improvements.

Prof. Isidro Martínez Duarte, Director General of the Secretaría de Educación y Cultura for the State of Chihuahua, described a cooperative effort between his state and El Paso Community College to teach English to elementary school students in Ciudad Juárez. The use of technology in education is also a priority in Chihuahua, with several initiatives underway in that area.

Lic. Temístocles Núñez López, Director de Enlace y Vinculación con Instituciones de Educación Superior de la Secretaría de Educación de Coahuila, described cooperative research projects conducted with Laredo State University focused on values and learning acquisition in children from both sides of the border. He also described the project focused on educational quality that was mentioned at the Monterrey meeting and noted the importance of the border governors' conferences to the furtherance of educational improvements.

From Tamaulipas, Ing. Oscar E. Guerra Corza, Director de Educación Media, Superior y Extraescolar, Secretaría de Educación, Cultura y Deportes, highlighted the formation of an education commission as part of the meetings of the border governors. The commission's purpose is specifically to identify and address border issues.

New initiatives emerging from the Border Colloquy. At the Austin meeting in August 1994, participants divided into regional work groups and began outlining action plans for cooperative work. Since then, these groups have been moving on a number of projects, with facilitation and, in some cases, resources provided by SEDL staff.

The *El Paso-Cd. Juárez-Las Cruces* work group has begun a series of cross-border seminars through which educators in the two countries can share their knowledge, experience, and concerns. The seminars are structured so that, in the first meeting, educators from Cd. Juárez speak to U.S. educators about Mexico's educational system; a few weeks later, the roles are reversed. Work group members are also arranging for cross-border visits to schools and educational agencies. The work group has been invited by the Secretary of Education in Chihuahua to learn in detail about the state's education agency and how it works. As a result of this exploration, the work group has scheduled a meeting to explore the possibility of a joint summer institute for school administrators. Finally, the work group is planning a technology fair in which representatives from Cd. Juárez, El Paso, and Las Cruces will share examples of technology uses in education.

The *Las Cruces-Deming* work group is pursuing the idea of a cross-national school for the communities of Columbus, New Mexico, and Palomas, Chihuahua. Work group members and SEDL staff have met with representatives from the Columbus, Palomas, and Deming schools to investigate the feasibility of such a plan and also have talked with state education agency staffs about the idea. In February 1995, the Chihuahua Secretary of Education, New Mexico Commissioner of Education, SEDL staff, work group members, and representatives from the Los Alamos National Laboratory met in Santa Fe to explore plans and discuss policy issues.

The Tamaulipas/Texas area work group, with support from SEDL staff, conducted a joint meeting in October 1994 with representatives from the Reynosa, Monterrey, and McAllen meetings attending. Participants in this meeting decided that their first step would be to involve a broader set of voices in the determination of activities needed in the area. They have arranged for and conducted a series of local forums in four sites to obtain local input for regional action plans.

In addition to assisting with regional work group activities, SEDL staff have formed a *Policy/Planning Advisory Group* for the project, with representation from each of the state-level educational agencies involved in the project and from each of the six regional information sharing meetings that were conducted during Phase 1 of the project. The group's purposes are to consider policy issues as they arise in the course of project activities, to facilitate local group interaction, and to serve in an advisory capacity to SEDL staff. The advisory group's first meeting was held in Austin in late February 1995, with cosponsorship by SEDL and the Texas Education Agency.

Plans for the Future

It is SEDL's goal, provided federal funding priorities and other circumstances allow, to continue the Border Colloquy Project at least through November 30, 1997. Based on input from meeting participants and educational issues outlined in the literature, it is clear that comprehensive change will take time, and that there is much to be done. Projects that SEDL staff hope to facilitate through the Border Colloquy Project include

- development of a model for successful teacher-administrator exchange;
- support for the use of educational technology to develop the concept of bilingualism;
- the pursuit and development of models for binational schools;
- efforts to align certification and accreditation; and
- joint research, including a comparative study of the two countries' educational systems.

Conclusions

With the sustained involvement and commitment of participants from the Border Colloquy meetings, SEDL hopes to establish a foundation from which educational systems, policies, and services can be adapted to the future needs of *la frontera*. However, the barriers are not insubstantial. Public resources are scarce in both countries. Adapting laws and policies to accommodate binational cooperation is virtually unprecedented. And attitudes among the public, in both countries, tend at times to be negative and suspicious. As one regional meeting participant noted, "This reality, this beautiful reality that we talked about creating this morning, we're going to have to drag some people along kicking and screaming all the way."

The gap between planning and implementation is also a challenge. As participants pointed out again and again, the kinds of discussion fostered by the Border Colloquy are essential, but similar meetings have been held in the past, without significant change. Follow-up action among all involved is essential. Only if everyone involved is committed to action will the promise of *la frontera*'s imagined future be realized:

The year 2010 is not far away; we must start working today.

Note: This article draws substantially from a report on the Border Colloquy Project, *Imagining La Frontera: SEDL's Border Colloquy* (Austin: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1994). Information in the section titled "Background: Issues Facing *La Frontera*" was drawn primarily from two articles by Rosalind Alexander-Kasparik (Ed.): "Border Issues in Education (Part 1)," *SEDLETTER*, September-December 1993, pp. 2-18; and "Border Issues in Education (Part 2)," *SEDLETTER*, January-April 1994, pp. 2-22. Reprints of both documents are available from SEDL, 211 East 7th Street, Austin, Texas, 78701. Telephone: 512/476-6861.

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